DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 114 RC 017 240

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TITLE Attitudes Toward the Education of American Indians. A Survey.
INSTITUTION Arizona State Univ., Tempe. Center for Indian Education.
PUB DATE Sep 88
NOTE 14p.
AVAILABLE FROM Center for Indian Education, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-1311.
PUB TYPE Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *American Indian Education; *Attitude Measures; Bilingual Education; *Educational Attitudes; Mail Surveys; Problems; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This paper provides results of a national survey of 110 educators involved in American Indian education on their general attitudes toward such education; of the total sample; 60 responses were received. Lack of funding for American Indian education was the most important national issue identified, followed by need for qualified Indian administrators and educators, curriculum issues, financial aid for students in higher education, and academic achievement. Locally, however, parent/family involvement and recruitment, retention, advisement, and counseling were rated among the top five needs. Nationally 35.1% of respondents felt that American Indian education has improved in the past five years, whereas 33.3% felt it has gotten worse. Comparable data are reported for improvement at the state and local levels. A majority of the respondents supported raising achievement standards but felt that Indian education fared poorly under the Reagan administration. Ninety-three percent believed that culture and language as well as academic studies should be the focus of Indian education programs. Almost 100% supported bilingual education for American Indians. While 92.7% believed there is a need to do more research in Indian education, only 21.8% knew of meaningful research being conducted. Results are presented in tables, but include summaries of comments on each question. The text of each question in the survey is included in this report. (DHP)

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A Survey:
Attitudes Toward the Education of American Indians

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September 1988

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A Survey:
Attitudes Toward the Education of American Indians

Background Information

A national sample of American Indian educators were asked a series of questions designed to obtain general attitudes toward the education of American Indians. The sample included representatives from American Indian tribes, Indian Organizations, Title IV Resource and Evaluation Centers, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Community Colleges, Indian Education Programs, State Departments of Education, Public Schools, and Colleges and Universities. A total of 110 survey questionnaires were mailed; 60 individuals responded. Of the 60, 49 or 89.1% of the sample identified themselves as American Indian. In all cases, the respondents were involved in the education of American Indian people.

The intent was not to reach absolute conclusions, but to gather and present data that would give general attitudes toward the education of American Indians. A few of the questions were patterned after the questions asked in the 19th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools published in the September 1987 issue of Phi Delta Kappan. This was done so that a few general comparisons could be made between the results of this survey and the Gallup Poll.

The findings are presented in the following tables. Some of the questions also asked for open-ended comments; the responses follow the respective tables. In most cases there were numerous comments. An attempt was made to group the comments; however, many stand alone and are not presented in this document because of their small numbers.

No attempt was made to analyze or interpret the data. It is suggested that the reader study the data, make observations, and draw appropriate conclusions.

Most Important Problems Facing American Indian Education

Table 1

Question: What are the five most important issues facing the education of American Indians today? Think of the issues from a national point of view. Rank the issues from most important to fifth most important.

	Number	%
Lack of funding	29	50.9
Need for qualified Indian administrators/educators	16	28.1
Curriculum issues	16	28.1
Financial Aid for college/university students	13	22.8
Academic achievement	12	21.1
Drop-outs/Leaving school	11	19.3
Parent involvement	9	15.8
Teacher preparation/training	8	14.0
Self-determination/sovereignty/trust responsibility	8	14.0
Drugs/substance abuse	8	14.0
Non-Indians' understanding/cooperating with Indians	8	14.0
Lack of leadership	7	12.3
Quality Indian education programs	7	12.3
Student self-esteem and motivation	7	12.3
Indian education legislation	7	12.3
BIA issues	6	10.5

N = 57

Table 2

Question: What are the most important issues facing the education of American Indians in your state? Again, rank the issues from the most important to the fifth most important.

	Number	%
Lack of funding	31	54.4
Curriculum issues	13	22.8
Parent/family involvement	11	19.3
Recruitment/retention/advisement/counseling	10	17.5
Lack of Indian administrators/educators	9	15.8
Financial Aid for college/university students	8	14.0
Drugs/substance abuse	7	12.3
Quality of instruction	7	12.3
Non-Indians' understanding of Indians/cooperation	6	10.5
Academic achievement	6	10.5
Drop-outs/leaving school	5	8.8
Teacher preparation/training	5	8.8
Apathy by the Indian community	5	8.8
More Indian graduates	5	8.8
Jurisdictional/self-determination/sovereignty	4	7.0
Lack of leadership	4	7.0
Student achievement	4	7.0

N = 57

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll question: What do you think are the biggest problems with the public schools in this (your) community must deal?

	National Totals %
Use of drugs	30
Lack of discipline	22
Lack of proper financial support	14
Difficulty in getting good teachers	9
Poor curriculum/poor standards	8
Large schools/overcrowding	8
Moral standards	7
Parents' lack of interest	6
Pupils' lack of interest/truancy	6
Drinking/alcoholism	6
Teachers' lack of interest	5
Low teacher pay	5
Lack of respect for teacher/other students	4
Integration/busing	4

Perceived Improvement of American Indian Education

Table 3

Question: Would you say that the education of American Indians, from a national point of view, has improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same during the past five years?

	Total %
Improved	35.1
Gotten Worse	33.3
Stayed the Same	28.1
Don't Know	3.5
N = 57	100.0

Question: Would you say that the education of American Indians, from a state point of view, has improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same during the past five years?

Table 4

	Total %
Improved	35.1
Gotten Worse	22.8
Stayed the Same	36.8
Don't Know	5.3
N = 55	100.0

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll question: Would you say that the public schools in this community have improved from, say, five years ago, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

	National Totals %
Improved	25
Gotten Worse	22
Stayed about the same	36
Don't Know	17

Perceptions about Education Reform and Standards

Question: Some people say that raising achievement standards will encourage American Indian students to do better in school. Others say that raising the standards will put American Indian students at such a disadvantage that they will become discouraged about school or will drop out. Do you think that raising achievement standards will encourage American Indian students to do better in school, or will it cause them to become discouraged or drop out? Comment on your response.

Table 5

	Total %
Yes, Encourage	57.1
No, Discourage	18.4
Don't Know	24.5
N = 49	100.0

Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll question: Some people say that raising achievement standards will encourage students from low-income backgrounds to do better in school. Others say that raising the standards will put these students at such a disadvantage that they will become discouraged about school or will even drop out. Do you think that raising achievement standards will encourage students from poor backgrounds to do better in school or will it cause them to become discouraged or to drop out?

	National Totals %
Yes, Encourage	52
No, Discourage	30
Don't Know	18
	100

Question: During the last five years there has been a lot of concern about the condition of education in the United States. There have been numerous reform reports that have identified concerns and presented recommendations. What impact has this national reform movement had on the education of American Indians?

Table 6

	Total %
No Impact	14.3
Little Impact	30.4
Some Impact	33.9
Significant Impact	14.3
Don't Know	7.1
N = 56	100.0

Table 7

Question: How has Indian Education fared under the Reagan Administration?

	Total %
Poorly	70.2
Fair	14.0
No Change	12.3
Good	3.5
Very Good	0.0
N = 55	100.0

Table 8

Question: What should be the focus of Indian Education programs? Comment on your response.

Academic	7.0
Cultural and Language	0.0
Both Academic and Culture and Language	93.0
N = 57	100.0

Comments: There were a total of 37 comments. Eight of the comments mentioned only "academics" as a focus of Indian Education programs. The rest of the comments related indicated both academic and culture and language should be a focus. Five mentioned the curriculum as a way to integrate culture and language into the academics; five also mentioned that a culture and language focus was important in the development of self-concept, which in turn was related to academics.

BIA Education

Table 9

Question: Should the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) turn over its education function to the tribes and states? Comment on your response.

No	50.0
Yes	50.0
N = 46	100.0

Comments: There were 53 separate comments to this question. In general, 28 respondents said "yes" to having the BIA turn over its education function to tribes, and 12 said "no" to states. However, tied to the "yes" answer were statements that the "tribes must decide," "if the tribes are interested," "after planning by the tribes" or if "tribes have quality staff and boards." Only four respondents indicated the "tribes were not ready" to take over. Seven respondents mentioned that education is a trust responsibility and the Federal Government/BIA must be held accountable for the education of American Indians.

Title IV - Indian Education Act

Table 10

Question: In 1972 the Indian Education Act (Title IV) was passed. What is your overall assessment of Title IV since 1972? Comment on your response.

	Total %
Very Good	22.6
Good	49.1
Fair	22.6
Poor	5.7
Very Poor	0.0
N = 53	100.0

Comments: Forty-three comments were made. Nine concerned the lack of funding for Title IV programs; six indicated Title IV provided opportunity for more parental involvement; four mentioned Title IV helped state departments, schools, and tribes to focus on the education of American Indians; four respondents stated that Title IV was poorly administered at the national level; and four mentioned Title IV provided educational opportunities for Indian students. The rest of the comments covered a wide variety of topics.

Question: What changes would you like to see in Title IV? Be specific.

Comments: Forty-nine suggestions were given. More money or increased funding for Title IV programs was mentioned more (14 times) than anything else. Eight comments dealt with Title IV eligibility requirements, including the 506 form. Six concerned strengthening parental involvement and five suggested the improvement of program accountability, including evaluation. Three comments suggested Title IV place more emphasis on research and three felt there needs to be a better national assessment of Title IV.

Perceptions about Bilingual Education

Table 11

Question: Do you support bilingual education for American Indian students?

	Total %
No	3.6
Yes	96.4
N = 56	100.0

Table 12

Question: In general, what approach to bilingual education is most effective with American Indians?

	Total %
BLE Transitional	38.9
Maintenance	33.3
ESL	11.1
Other	16.7
N = 36	100.0

Comments: Of the 17 comments offered, four indicated the bilingual approach depends on the local community or area. Four also said they did not know or understand the difference in the approaches.

Perceptions about Research in Indian Education

Table 13

Question: Is there a need to do more research in the education of American Indian students?

	Total %
No	7.3
Yes	92.7
N = 55	100.0

Comments: Respondents were asked to suggest research topics and questions. Among the 48 suggested and the number of times they were mentioned were: Drop-outs (8), relationship between cultural factors and academic achievement (7), learning styles (6), bilingual education (5), teaching styles (4), factors of successful students (4), testing (3), and career education (3).

Question: Do you know of any meaningful research being conducted right now?

Table 14

	Total %
No	78.2
Yes	21.8
N = 55	100.0

Comments: Only 12 comments were made when asked to identify meaningful research being conducted right now. Studies on successful Indian students, bilingual education, student retention, and an adult literacy assessment were specifically mentioned. Other comments were general in nature, some citing sources of research, i.e. ERIC and the Bilingual Clearinghouse.

Teaching

Question: One concern questions the preparation of teachers by colleges and universities. What do you think teachers should know to be effective teachers of American Indian students?

Comments: Fifty-seven individuals commented. The largest number of respondents (28) mentioned that teachers should be knowledgeable about the culture and values of their Indian students. Thirteen (13) mentioned that effective teachers should know about the history, including tribal histories, of their students. Eight (8) comments referred to student "learning styles" as something teachers should know. Six (6) suggested that teachers need to take courses that deal with working with and teaching culturally different people; multicultural and human relation courses were mentioned. Five (5) comments suggested that teachers need to know about the Indian community and ways to get parents involved. Other comments were mentioned, but with less frequency and are not presented here.